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Symon Schermerhoorn's Ride

February 8, 1690

Writ from facts and traditions as set down in ye old records of ye Massacre of Skinnechtady, and in commemoration of Symon Schermerhoorn's ride to save ye inhabitants of Albany from ye French and Indians.

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Introductory Note

Full as are the pages of the Book of American Heroes who fought, bled and died for their country, surely there can be found a space on which even at this late date may be inscribed the brave act of Symon Schermerhoorn, who, at the Massacre of Schenectady, on the night of February 8 and 9, 1690, after his son and negro slaves (3) had been slaughtered, took horse to ride to Fort Orange (Albany, N. Y.) that he might save the inhabitants from a similar fate.

While fighting his way through the French and Indians, he and his horse were wounded, he seriously in the thigh with a bullet.

Instead of considering himself and his wound and attempting the shorter and more direct route to Albany, he selected the River road, of almost double the distance, that he might warn the settlers of Canastageoine (Niskayuna) and others living on the banks of the Mohawk and Hudson rivers above Albany.

He rode for six long, weary hours, the terrible cold eating into the hole in his thigh, a wound such that every movement of the plunging horse caused him intense agony. All this over a road so impeded with drifted snow that soldiers on horse and foot, the following morning, were unable to advance.

*Surely somewhere in THE BOOK can be found
space for one more name.*

The author begs to acknowledge in the compilation of this work the assistance and courtesies of the County Clerk's office (Albany); State Historian Victor Hugo Paltsits, John Pierce, Esq., and his esteemed friend George H. Thacher, Esq., to whose advice and encouragement whatever literary merit this poem may contain is due.

Symon Jacobse Schermerhoorn

Born 1658

When no monument marks a true hero's
grave,

And no chiseled line his brave deeds
adorn,

Let mine be the pen for the future to save

The name and the fame of a Schermer-
hoorn.

Harry Roy Smuy

Illustrations

- Title page *Charles Selkirk*
- Facsimile of old record *Photo by Stroessel*
- “As nodding he sat 'fore the chimney brest”
F. O. C. Darley
- “Mingled with many an anguished cry” *F. O. C. Darley*
- Map showing forts and roads *Souther*
- “A savage pack from the North they came” . *Rheinhardt*
- Old cut of a massacre (artist unknown)
Loaned by Hon. J. H. Manning
- Heading, letters and tailpiece *Charles Selkirk*

Facsimile from the original minutes of the Mayor and Aldermen of Albany, as set down in the book of records of date February 9, 1690; found in the office of the Clerk of the County of Albany, N. Y.; now bound into a book marked Mortgages No. 3, and dated 1765-75. It is the only known record that proves time, conditions and facts of Schermerhoorn's ride; it is in the handwriting of Robert Livingston, Jr. (a nephew of Robert Livingston, the first Lord of the Manor), who was afterward Mayor of Albany.

A Party of 9. day of February 17th 70
Be. S. H. H. H.

This morning about 5 a Clock of Alarm was brought
here by Tomer & Hornes Lown who was shot thro his
Thigh wth by french and Indians had murder'd wth People of
Thennechtad, having got into wth Truce about 11 or 12 a Clock
tho being wth water kept (by Inhabitants being so negligent
& refractory) and wth he had much wth to escape they being
very numerous They fired several times at him at last threw
his Thigh and wained his Load and was come into Canatage:
about to bring wth news.

The alarm being given all People repaired to the
Coast of fort found several guns to give wth alarm to wth far-
was but few heard tho being such an extrem hour about
three Dign several of People having escaped wth readily
of wth french and tho Indians came running thro
told us wth Collage was a find and wth they had much wth
to

Portrait
F. Schuyler
D. W. H. H.
J. B. H. H.
C. B. H. H.
Gent. H. H.
all. H. H.
H. H. H. H.
H. H. H. H.

to Escape for all y^e woods were full of French and Indians, by
y^e many people were murdered and y^e y^e enemy were marching in
the which news was continually confirmed till afternoon
Letters were sent forthwith to Lopez for y^e assistance of a hundred
men an Express sent to Kachhook but by reason of y^e high water
Deep Snow & y^e could not Proceed notice was given to all y^e
farmers of kindred & Clarks w^{ch} of y^e sad news, some horse
and sent out to Discover y^e Enemies force and this march
but was forced to Return y^e Snow being so Deep yet some who
sent out again who got that Mr. Lawrence y^e Indian with y^e
Maguass y^e who in Maine were sent out also to Shinnecady
to Dispatch posts to y^e Maguass Castles for all y^e Indians to come
down but unhappily w^{ch} Indians coming to Shinnecady
who did much amazed to see so many people murdered and
destroyed that they omitted y^e sending up to y^e Maguass
Castles according to y^e Engagement, while y^e enemy was
at N. Scotia a man came to Ensign Jos. Lander, Gen. and
aid he would go to y^e Maguass Castles and warn y^e Maguass,
to come down who was obliged to go in all haste but coming to y^e
upper Plantations went for sea along with some of y^e Indian
Lands into y^e woods and never went to y^e Maguass Castles, this
night we got a letter from Shinnecady informing us y^e the
Enemy y^e had done y^e business for this was about 150 or 200 men
but that there were 1000 men in all, we army for Albany & onward
for Lopez, which hindered much y^e marching of any force into y^e
City having y^e y^e enemy might watch each an opportunity

The 10th day of February

May
20th

Resolved y^e Capt. Jonathan Bull went w^{ch} 5 men into
each Comp^y to Shinnecady so being dead there y^e y^e
Plans to come down to join with them & demand y^e Enemy

Jynon Schernerhoorn's Ride

Schenectady to Albany

February 8, 1690. ≈



ON a winter's night of long ago, 1

The snow lay deep, the wind

did blow

In fitful gusts that wildly shrieked,

The roof tiles rattl'd—timbers creaked,

The shutters tugged at latch and hinge, 5

The whole house shook, it seem'd to cringe

'Neath the savage blasts that winter's night,

As wild beasts do when sore affright.

[A blast



"As nodding he sat 'fore the chimney brest"

A blast more fierce than those before
Wrench'd the windows and sprung the door: 10
The noise outside and wild wind screams
Startled the Burgher from peaceful dreams,
As nodding he sat 'fore the chimney brest
With eyes half clos'd and chin on chest,
Glanced at th' clock that stately stands, 15
Marking the time with tireless hands,
"The hour is late," he softly said,
"Vrouw, go put the children to bed.

["Quick

“Quick return, and ’ere we retire

We’ll chat awhile by open fire.” 20

Up rose the Burgher, pipe in hand,

Walked to the window, took a stand

Where he could scan the village street,

He thought he caught the sound of feet;

He seem’d to see, through frosted pane, 25

A horse’s shape, its tangled mane,

Foaming nostrils, blood-matted hair,

And steaming breath on th’ cold night air,

[The face

The face of rider, pinched and drawn ;

Another blast — the phantom's gone. 30

Hand to brow in a troubled way,

With nod and wink that seem'd to say

He didn't believe in ghosts and such,

Phlegmatic, indeed, the hardy Dutch.

With shuffling gait and puzzled air, 35

He wanders back to his easy chair

And to vrouw, return'd to fireside,

He tells the story of Symon's ride.

[Said he



“Mingled with many an anguished cry”

Said he: " Not many have heard the tale

Of Symon's ride o'er the River Trail, 40

On that fatal night, so long ago,

When Corlaer Town was all aglow,

And wanton flames roared to the sky,

Mingled with many an anguished cry

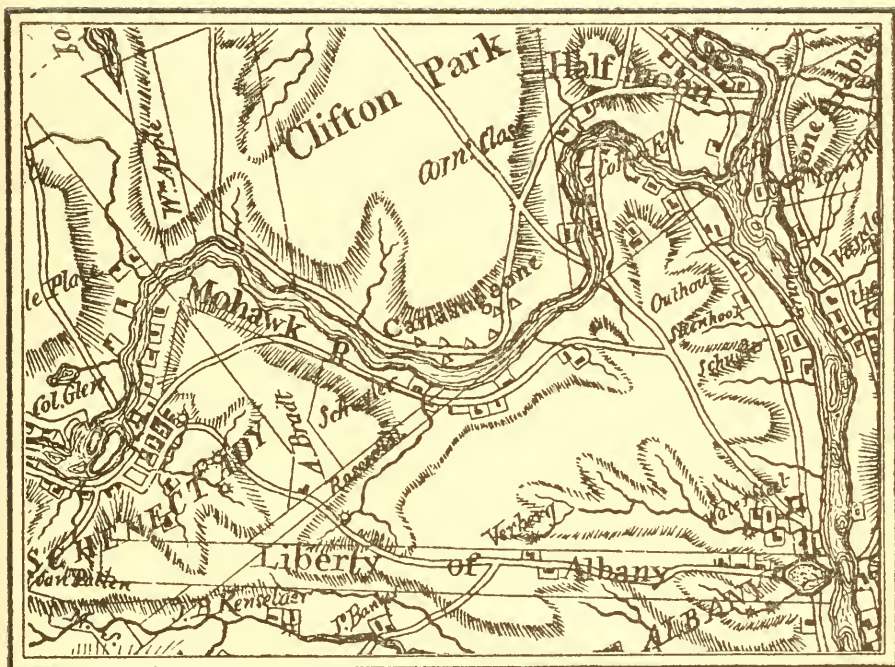
From grey-haired men, and women who 45

Strove to hide their babes from view;

Mothers heavy drew no quarter,

Blood in streams flow'd there like water.

[" Brave



Map showing forts and roads

“ Brave indeed are men who fight

Helpless women in the night.

50

’Twas sixteen ninety—that’s the date,

Of’t I’ve heard old men relate

How Symon, wounded deep in thigh,

Rode through snow, piled mountain high,

In scanty garb on crippled steed,

55

None could do a braver deed ;

Six long hours of untold strain,

Six long hours of fearful pain,

[“ As fierce

“As fierce cold bit the gaping wound,

Ever onward — then he swooned 60

At old North Gate by riverside,

Where jaded horse lay down and died,

And Symon’s lips, op’d as in death,

Releas’d the words, with falt’ring breath,

That warned the Burghers dwelling here, 65

Causing the brave to shrink with fear

As he told the fate of Corlaer Town;

How French and Indian burn’d it down,

[“Slew sixty

“ Slew sixty odd, both young and old,—

He swooned away, his tale half told. 70

Those were the days when Dutchmen fought,

With Fate for foothold, dearly bought,

And beaver pelts served as gold,

For goods the Dutch to Maquaas sold ;

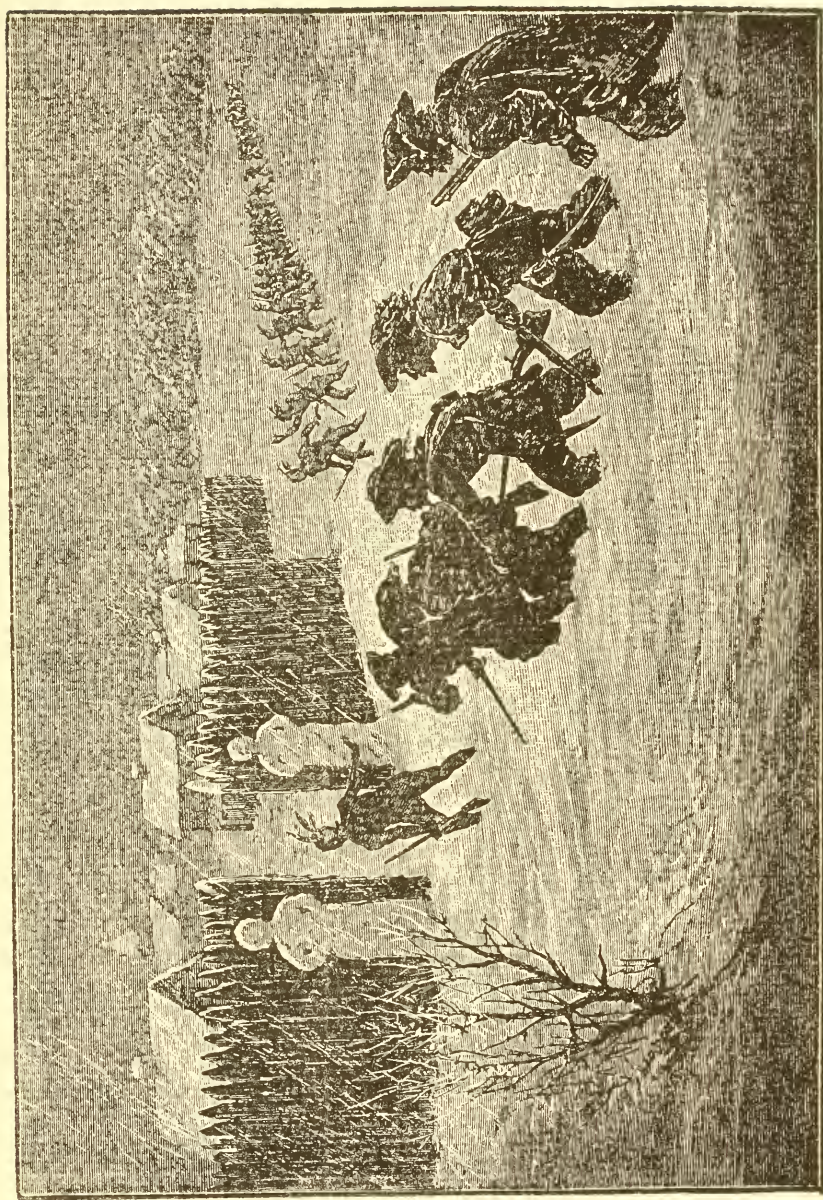
When beacon's flash, from mountain height, 75

Bore ghastly message, through the night,

That tomahawk and scalping knife

Again did menace limb and life.

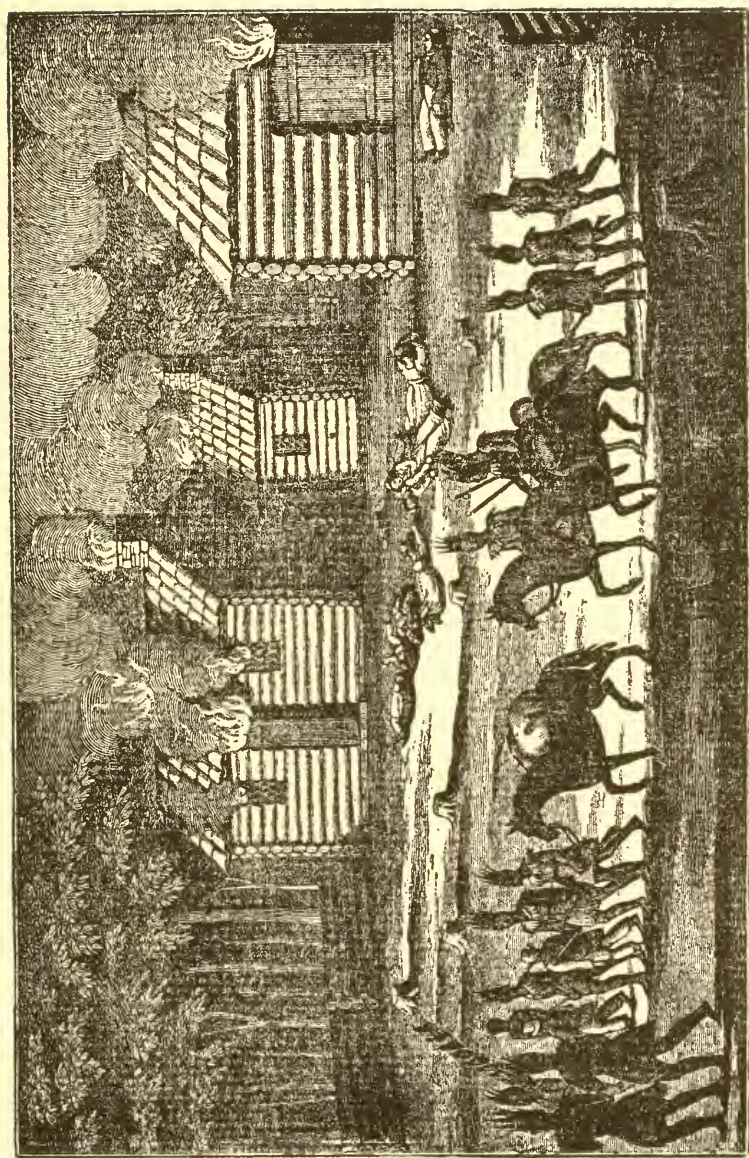
[“ A savage



"A savage pack from the North they came"

“A savage pack, from the North they came,
They'd have come in vain,—more's the shame, 80
If stockade gates had been bolt'd tight
When Schenectady slept that winter's night:
But men will quarrel, though wrong or right,
So gates swung wide — a factional fight.
What saith the Bible on yon shelf, 85
Of house divided 'gainst itself,
'Shall surely fall,' and great the pity,
What's true of house is true of city.

[“By stealth



Old cut of a massacre (artist unknown)

“By stealth they came, through River Gate—

'Twould almost seem that hand of Fate 90

Made easy road for the frozen horde,

It's not recorded they thank'd the Lord,—

With wild warwhoop they fiercely slew,

E'en babes and children, and mothers, too;

Left was BUT ONE alive and free, 95

Of all that old Dutch companie,

Save Sander Glen and a widow that

Bore the ancient name of Bradt.

[“The one

“The one that stood alive and free,

Brave remnant of Schinnectady, 100

Who won his life, his spurs as well,

Fought o'er his dead wife where she fell,

And dying child that by her side,

Called to its mother, gasp'd and died—

Was Adam Vrooman — forgot of fame, 105

Who fought to end, through smoke and flame,

To find at last that he stood alone,

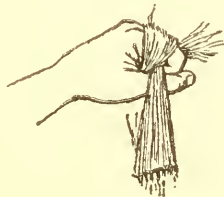
For naught remained but stricken home,

[“And glory

“And glory, the brave man ever wins,
Who fights his fight—bears on and grins. 110

The legend tells how a drunken crew
Drank deep that night of Douw Aukes' brew,
In The Tavern on State and old Mill Lane,
How the Indians slaughtered the very same;
Like sheep in a shamble kill'd them there, 115
And lifted each gory scalp and hair,—
Ah! 'twas a terrible massacre.”

Here endeth the story of
SYMON SCHERMERHOORN.



[L'envoi

Épouoi



YMON SCHERMERHOORN'S long

since dead,

No stone marks the spot

where rests his head,

No graver has yet there writ his story,

No statue's rear'd to his fame or glory ;

Forgotten the deed of man and beast,

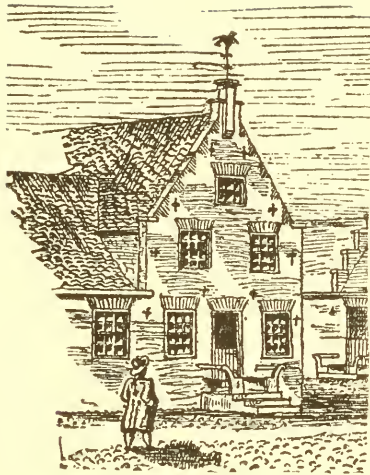
Though sorely wounded, who never ceas'd,

'Till one fell dead at Fort Orange gate,

The other gasp'd forth the awful fate,

Of Schenectady Town — its tragic plight,

Long years ago, that winter's night.



Historical Notes

Notes

Some idea of the historical importance of Schermerhoorn's ride to prevent a surprise of Albany similar to that of Schenectady may be gained from the fact that had the French taken Albany they would have advanced down the Hudson river to Esopus, where they were to await the coming of another horde of 600, the joint forces to move on to New Amsterdam (New York), which in all probability they would have overcome. Schermerhoorn, when making his escape and ride from Schenectady, was under the impression that the French and Indian force was over a thousand strong, nor could he have known that on the morrow at noon they would turn back to Canada, unable to longer stand their privations and the cold.

PAGE 13. Symon Jacobse Schermerhoorn, according to old records, was born in 1658, a son of Jacob Janse, born in Holland, 1622, and one of the first settlers here. Symon married Willemptje Velie, a sister of Douw Aukes' wife, the keeper of The Tavern in 1690 (corner of State street and Mill Lane, Schenectady). In 1688, Symon moved from Albany to Schenectady. 1693 found him a skipper on the Hudson river with his home in New York. From him descended the Schermerhoorns now living there.—*History of the Schenectady Patent, Pierson.*

LINE 3. In the olden days vessels sailing from Holland to this country, with empty space in their holds, ballasted with roof tiles and brick. Some of these old brick are still doing service in the sidewalks on Columbia street, Albany, to-day.

LINE 40. "and was come over Canastageonie (Niskayuna) to bring ye news."—Old MSS., page 14. The road

that led to Niskayuna was called on the old maps of the date (Souther's) the "River road" to distinguish it from the "Orange road," now the Schenectady turnpike. The manuscript on page 14 shows conclusively the route taken by the rider. The River road ran into the "Waterfleet turnpike" which in turn bore to the North Gate of the Albany stockade.

LINE 42. The French and Northern Indians called the town of Schenectady, "Corlaer." The name recurs throughout all of the French records of the massacre.

LINE 47. "The cruelties committed at sd Place no Penn can write nor Tongue expresse, ye women big with Childe Rip'd up and ye Children alive thrown into ye flames, and their heads Dashed in Pieces against the Doors and windows."—*D. Wessels Ten Broeck and Kilian Van Rensselaer to Governor Bradstreet, 1690.*

LINES 49 AND 50. "The French were sensible what horror this cruel sacking of a defenceless Place, and murdering People in cold Blood, must have on mens minds, and to lessen this they resolved to show their gratitude to Captain Glen."—*History of Five Nations, p. 115.*

LINE 51. February 8 and 9, 1690.—See MSS., page 14.

LINE 53. "who was shott threw his Thigh."—Old MSS., page 14.

LINE 54. "Some horsemen sent out to Discover ye Enimies force and their march, but were forced to Return, ye snow being so deep."—*Old Deed, County Clerk's Office, Albany, N. Y.*

"We sent out some few horse forth with after we had Rec'd ye news, but scarsely could get throw ye deep snow, some whereof got to ye De Solato" (Sand Plains).—*Letter, Dirk Wessels Ten Broeck and Kilian Van Rensselaer, to Governor Bradstreet.*

LINE 55. "and wounded his horse."—Old MSS., page 14.

LINES 57 AND 58. The massacre commenced at 11 o'clock and Symon arrived in Albany at 5 in the morning.

LINES 60 TO 65. That Symon fell fainting from his horse at the North Gate of Albany and was able only to lisp the warning words, is an old legend. The conditions existing from exhaustion, exposure and wound would indicate its probability.

LINE 66. No better idea of the effect that the news of the massacre produced on the people of Albany can be obtained than the following extract from the letter to Governor Bradstreet : "To our Grief and Sorrow we must acquaint you with our Deplorable Condition, there haveing never ye Like Dreadful massacre and murther been Committed in these Parts of America, as has been acted by ye french and their Indians at Shinnechtady 20 miles from Albanie."

LINE 69. "They murdered 60 persons and bore away with them 27 prisoners, wounding some others."—*Lysler to the Bishop of Salisbury*.

"Killed and destroyed 60 men, women and children, carried 27 men and boys prisoners, and burnt ye town."—*Robert Livingston to Sir Edmund Andrus, April, 1690*.

LINE 73. To show the use of the beaver's pelt as coin of the land, no better example can be found than this : "By the contract between Helmer Otten's widow and Jan Janse Bleeker and Hans Hendrickse, guardians for her daughter Catryna, made July 1, 1676, said widow agreed to pay her daughter as soon as she was of age or married, ye somme of 225 whole beaver skins for payment of which said Ariaantje doth bind farm (No. 4)."—*Veeder Papers*.

LINE 74. The Indians of Albany and vicinity were always referred to in all of the old Dutch records as the Maquaas. Their principal forts or strongholds were located north of Schenectady, and known as Maquaas Castle No. 1 and 2. They were, as a matter of fact, Mohicans or Mohegans.

LINE 79. The French and Indians that massacred the people of Schenectady came from Montreal, down the

shores of Lake Champlain. The trip consumed 22 days and was fraught with most intense hardships. There were 210 all told. 114 Frenchmen, 80 savages from the Sault, and 16 Algonquins, commanded by Lemoine de St. Helene.

LINE 80. "and more's th' shame."

"Tho as the French owned afterwards, if they had found the least 'Guard or Watch, they would not have attempted the place, but have surrendered themselves Prisoners,' they were so exceedingly distressed with the Length of their March, and with Cold, and Hunger."—*History of Five Nations*, p. 114, Pub. 1714.

LINES 81 TO 84. "The people of that Towne were so bygotted to Lysler that they would not obey any of ye Magistrates." * * Thus had Lysler perpereted ye poor people by his seditious letters, now found all bloody on Skinnectady streets, with the notions of free trade and boalting, etc., and thus are they destroyed; they would not watch and where Capt'n Sander (Glen) commanded, there they threatened to burn him upon ye fire if he came upon ye garde."—*Letter, Robert Livingston to E. Andrus, April 14, 1690.*

LINE 89. "The Town of Corlaer forms a sort of oblong with only two gates, one opposite the road we had taken, the other leading to Orange. De St. Helaine & de Mantet were to enter the first. Messrs. d'Iberville and de Montesson took the left. * * * But they could not discover it and returned to join the remainder of the party."—*De Monsignat to Madam de Maintenon.*

LINE 91. "At eleven o'clock at night they came within sight of the Town (but) resolved to defer the assault untill two o'clock of the morning. But excessive cold admitted of no further delay."—*M. De Monsignat to Madam de Maintenon.*

LINE 93. "The signal of attack was given Indian fashion, and the whole force rushed on simultaneously."

LINE 94. "Murdered evry Person they met, Men, Women, and Children, naked and in cold blood."—*History of Five Nations*, p. 114.

LINES 97 AND 98. "None were spared in the town but one house belonging to Condre (Sander Glen) and that of a widow (Bratt) who had six children, whither M. de Montigny had been carried when wounded."—*De Monsignat to Madam de Maintenon*.

LINES 100 TO 110. Adam Vrooman. "Adam, son of Hendrick Meese, born in Holland 1647. In 1670 bound himself for two years to Cornelis Van den Bergh of Albany to learn millwright's trade, for 80 guilders in silver and a pair of new shoes the first year, 120 guilders the second year. 1683 he built a mill on the Sand-kil where the Brandywine now stands. In 1690, when Schenectady was destroyed, he saved his life by his bravery in defending his house which stood near the North Gate on the West corner of Front and Church streets. On this occasion his wife Engelte, with her infant child, was killed."—*Henry Yates and Dutch Church Papers*.

LINES 111 TO 117. There seems to be every reason to believe the tradition of the drunken brawl at The Tavern of Douw Aukes on the night of the massacre. That all of the revellers gathered there were killed and scalped by the Indians has been generally accepted by compilers of Colonial history.

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